IamA former creative director of Maxis / The Sims, and I made the financially questionable choice to leave and make an indie mobile game. AMA!
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Community: r/IAmA
Posted by: u/MergeDragons
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Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/5ltgky/iama_former_creative_director_of_maxis_the_sims/

Three years ago I left **Maxis** to develop a game on my own (well, actually I *tried* to get funding and a small team, but that didn't work out, so I flew solo). The game is *Merge Dragons* and it is now out. It has been a LONG, but satisfying journey. **AMA.**

Play it here: http://www.mergedragons.com/play.html.
Player screenshots here: https://twitter.com/hashtag/mergedragons

SHORT BIO

* I have a "Master of Entertainment Technology" degree (seriously).
* Games I've worked on: http://www.raymazza.com/published-games.html
* 10 Years at Maxis as engineer, designer, lead designer, & creative director on Sims games.
* Spent the last 3 years developing *Merge Dragons* full time, then part time, then cramming it into nights & weekends while juggling a kid.
* I love side-projects, and have published a technothriller series: https://www.amazon.com/gp/bookseries/B00PNJ3TH4/ref=dp_st_147512192X

PROOF: http://www.raymazza.com/game-design/reddit-ama

UPDATE: I will be wrapping up around ~4:30pm PST.

UPDATE 2: I'm wrapping this up. Thank you for all the questions, and see you next time!

UPDATE 3: I will check back occasionally to try and answer late questions that appear. Cheers!

COMMENTS (49 fetched)

[u/MergeDragons] [76 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
In The Sims 2, it was the coding that made the service Sims real people. In TS1, the maid, cop, firefighter, etc, would all do their jobs, but that's it. In The Sims 2, if you struck up a conversation with them you'd be able to make friends with them, and invite them over, get romantic, even marry them. It was always so much fun to make a cop part of your family, and have them change into their uniform, etc.

In The Sims 3, I had a broader influence on the game, and I'm very proud of the open world aspect that the design team worked on together. It fundamentally changed how the Sims was played -- being able to walk across the street and visit your neighbor.

For something that I was solely responsible for, it was a lot of the build mode advancements -- being able to work on a free form placement mode outside of the grid, adding lots of "clutter" objects and locations to put them, being able to freely rotate objects, etc, and officially support it. Even being able to drag walls back and forth without having to demolish your home! It gave builders such a great leap in their tools to make better looking homes and I was quite proud of that.

One smaller piece that I'm proud of that I feel like mentioning even though it's tiny is that you can collect meteorites around the landscape. I made sure that the bulk of them were named after real meteorite types (e.g. *Carbonaceous Chondrite* or *Eucrite*, etc) and had similar relative rarities to what's found on earth. I always loved how games could teach you things in a fun way, and this was one of those aspects.

[u/emberdaze] [28 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I just wanted to thank you for your part in developing the sims, those changes really are amazing. Also, really appreciate the meteorite tidbit, I adore collecting in that game and spotting connections to real life.

[u/velvert] [26 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Do you play the Sims games on a regular basis? Which one is your favorite and least favorite?

[u/MergeDragons] [57 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I used to play Sims games a LOT. The Sims (1) came out while I was in college, and I remember picking it up with my then-girlfriend (now wife) and then playing it for endless hours. The checkout clerk told me, "be careful, or you won't sleep." He was right.

So I developed a love of Sims games before working at Maxis, and I remember playing them alongside Diablo II :)

I loved The Sims 2, but I probably played The Sims 3 the most. What was great for me about The Sims 3 was that even though I was a co-lead designer and I knew so much about how the game operated and I had written so many of the designs, it still managed to surprise me time and again. My favorite aspects were the creative ones -- filling out a town with Sims that I'd made, painting screenshots on the easel from images I'd taken in game, writing novels and naming them, etc. I also loved the first expansion, "World Adventures" for the exploration aspects of going through tombs.

For least favorite, I would say the console games, just because I found the control schemes prevented me from becoming absorbed.

I played Sims games right up until I left Maxis in January of 2014. At that point, I basically devoted most of my free time to working on Merge Dragons. In fact, I have played what I would consider very few games since then, as I've put almost all my free time into developing Merge Dragons.

[u/KerafyrmPython] [3 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Diablo II was so great!

Stone of Jordans

Good Times

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Hehe, good old SoJ :)

[u/velvert] [9 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I understand about the consoles. I had Sims 2 on PS2 and the content was very limited. I gotta say 3 is my favorite as well!

I also love Diablo II

[u/LumaDaylight] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
/r/slashdiablo

Private reddit server that is alive and well! So much fun

[u/sneakpeekbot] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
###Here's a sneak peek of /r/slashdiablo using the top posts of all time!

\#1: [Dear Slashdiablo](https://www.reddit.com/r/slashdiablo/comments/5hndl2/dear_slashdiablo/)

\#2: [Found your mom in the game](http://i.imgur.com/OOxxY8l.png) ^^[comments](https://np.reddit.com/r/slashdiablo/comments/4gaobt/found_your_mom_in_the_game/)

\#3: [Cayson Hiivala, the 19 year old otherwise known as u/oppressedtoaster and Admin of this subreddit, is it critical condition after a horrible car accident yesterday.](https://www.reddit.com/r/slashdiablo/comments/1ie3ko/cayson_hiivala_the_19_year_old_otherwise_known_as/)

^^I'm ^^a ^^bot, ^^beep ^^boop

[u/[deleted]] [34 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]

Now that Maxis imploded on itself what is your opinion on the Sims 4 questionable launch and lack of features?

[u/MergeDragons] [54 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
My opinion is that making a Sims sequel is incredibly challenging.

As a designer, it hurts, because you always want your game to be better than before *in every way*, but in order to make new things, we had to make compromises on features established from previous games. Also, if it were up to the design team, we'd just keep working on the game until it blows all previous base games out of the water, but the schedule (and budget) do not allow that to be possible. In the future, I'd personally like to see development that can re-use a lot more of what came before without having to remake it all.

As for Maxis, I don't think it has imploded on itself, and I think we can expect great things from them in the future. I know they've learned a lot from developing TS4, and they have some great talent that has recently returned to the company from TS2 days.

EDIT: I previously had a statement about how fans compare a new base game to previous base game plus expansions, and that wasn't accurate and was an over-generalization. The Sims community let me know I was wrong there, and I don't want to perpetuate that, so I removed it.

[u/enderandrew42] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Maxis didn't develop The Sims 3, which most people seem to prefer in retrospect. In the past 13 years they developed:

* 2008 - Spore - Seem as a big disappointment from what was advertised and pitched to the public, though an interesting concept that was perhaps never fully realized
* 2011 - Darkspore - Still not really fully realized
* 2013 - SimCity - Seen as a massive track wreck and a failure to capture the gameplay of its predecessors. It was a technical and PR disaster at the worst, and not a very fun game at the best. Cities Skylines is vastly better in every way.
* 2014 - The Sims 4 - Basic features that were there in all 3 previous games just magically disappeared and the game was widely blasted.

Maxis has had massive layoffs and there has been speculation that EA will completely shutter the studio. Even if that doesn't happen, I don't know there is any consumer trust of the studio anymore.

It is a shame given how excellent the studio once was ages ago.

I think it is fair to say Maxis imploded on its self when they haven't had a good release in 13 years.

[u/MergeDragons] [7 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Clarification here: the "Maxis" name on the studio did shift to follow Will Wright at his Emeryville studio with Spore and such. But that didn't really affect the Sims teams much in

that most of the people on The Sims 1 continued onto The Sims 2, then onto The Sims 3, then onto The Sims 4, regardless of where the label "Maxis" happened to be. People have naturally joined and left the Sims teams over time, but there has always been a common thread of the usual devs from one game to the next.

[u/thatoneguy54] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Awww, I liked spore quite a bit

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
I've been impressed with how long World of Warcraft has kept going, and they have gone through visual changes and all sorts of feature evolutions. Some of its age shows through, but they've done a pretty good job of keeping the game from being too dated. It's a pretty good model.

Each version of The Sims has had a strong reason to need a major re-write though.

The Sims 2 was 3D, when The Sims 1 was not, so all the content had to be remade. We did, however, get to re-use a lot of the script and then build off it for the gameplay side, since it was the same scripting language.

The Sims 3 Needed a fairly major re-write because of the open world aspect, and also that we had decided to move to C# as the scripting language. TS1 & TS2 had used a proprietary scripting language which was elegant in many respects, but hard to learn and difficult to do more complicated things with. We were able to re-use some animation on TS3 though.

The Sims 4 Again went through a re-write for various reasons, but I can't speak to those as well because I wasn't on the project at the beginning.

I hope we've gotten all the re-writes out of our system by this point :)

[u/Shisno_] [14 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Why should I try Merge Dragons?

Follow up: Will I be annoyed to death with offers to buy in-game extras?

I plan to check out your book series once I finish reading the one I am currently enjoying.

[u/MergeDragons] [16 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Thank you Shisno.

You should play because *Merge Dragons* is unlike anything you've tried before. I set out to make a game that was widely appealing, easy to pick up, and not like the millions of other games out there.

But I should let someone else convince you. One of the creative staff of Telltale Games

contacted me out of the blue to tell me this: "I work at Telltale Games and as I’m sure you’ve heard, your game has become quite a sensation among many of our creative staff." "I’ve played more Merge Dragons than any other mobile game", "I really admire the thought put into this game -- it has all the microtransaction stuff you would expect, but the game is so regularly accessible when I want it to be despite that and actually rewards the player on a consistent basis for simply just playing. I also love how simplistic yet engaging the merge mechanic is. It’s funny, a bunch of us have started joking that certain trees and things we see remind us of the trees in the game and then we’re bummed we can’t merge them in real life." "I do honestly feel like it’s been one of the best mobile games I’ve ever played."

You will *not* be annoyed by popups & offers. I didn’t want to make a game that would annoy me, as a player who doesn’t like those sort of games. Also, although there is an "energy" mechanic, it is very loose and only there to prevent exploits. The average player plays for about 1.5 hours a day in 2-3 sessions, so you can play for a very long time. The game never forces you to pay for anything, either.

[u/[deleted]] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
> Merge Dragons is unlike anything you’ve tried before

Well, it does add some new features to the [merge game](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.spryfox.tripletown&hl=en) template, but I think "unlike anything" might be stretching a bit.

[u/crashmd] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
This whole AMA I’ve been wondering, *Why leave Maxis to go make mobile clones on your own?*

[u/MergeDragons] [11 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
That would be a bad idea. Good thing I didn’t leave to make mobile clones. If Merge Dragons is a clone of something, I’d love to know.

In another response I addressed my thought process leading up to my decision. But here I’ll tell you what is great about it:

* I had a vision I believed in that I thought causal gamers would love, and I have been able to realize that vision and see the happiness it brings players. It’s cathartic and satisfying.
* Working on my own, the game’s quality was entirely up to me. Nobody could tell me it had to ship on date X, or that I couldn’t put a feature in. If the game isn’t great, I can only blame myself.
* It’s a great experience that has expanded my skill set widely. I had to code every aspect of the game (aside from some code packages I used). I had to set up and handle an art outsourcing pipeline, and learn how to touch it up and get it into the game in a scalable way. I had to forage for audio. I had to make marketing screenshots and learn the ins and outs of the app store. I’ve had to understand analytics and marketing tools. I dabbled with shaders for the first time. And I learned how to use Unity.
* Lastly, I absolutely love the interaction with players and the community, and the cycle of getting feedback that directs the development of the game. Although I had that at Maxis,

it was a much longer timescale, and often I couldn't really reply due to rules about what we were allowed to talk about. With this, someone can make a suggestion or point out a problem, and I can have a change ready in the next month's update.

I will say that the mobile scene was far better three years ago when I made the decision, and the app stores weren't overflowing with garbage like they are today. Had I known what the scene would look like now, I might have made a different decision (but I'm glad I didn't).

Also, there are plenty of PC games I'd love to make too. See my response to /u/NecromanticChimera. This just happened to be what I wanted to make first.

[u/MergeDragons] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
"Unlike anything" may be a stretch, sure, and you can see my comparisons to other games in my response to /u/kaysea112 with similarities to Triple Town, Okami, Sims, and Bejweled/Peggle. The point is that it can't be summed up by saying "it's like game X, but with Y" because so much is different from what's out there.

Saying it adds "new features to the merge game template" is a little off base I think because merging is really the only similarity between Triple Town and Merge Dragons. It's kind of like comparing Duck Hunt to Modern Warfare because the main mechanic is shooting in both of them. Pretty much everything else is different.

[u/Shisno_] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Another followup: When will it be available on the amazon games store?

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Not sure. Maybe a few months. I have been leaving a few months between platforms to gauge stability. I'm also aiming to finish translations for other major languages first.

[u/forava7] [8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
If you could design or develop any game ever made, which one would you want to design? and why?

[u/MergeDragons] [14 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
This is an incredible question.

One of my favorite games of all time is the original Zelda, but I wouldn't want to pick that because that would have destroyed my enjoyment of it and the joy of discovery and adventure. Similarly with Super Metroid.

My answer is going to be Minecraft -- not because of its financial success, but because although I loved it, there was so much more I wanted out of it that my favorite games had given me and that would have been perfect for Minecraft. I loved the sense of adventure and the exploration (I'm an explorer gamer type). But I always felt like there wasn't enough there to find that felt meaningful, like there had been a sense of history and mystery to the world -- hand crafted pieces molded seamlessly into the fabric of the generated landscape that make you wonder why they're there, what they mean, and what you'll discover

next... and what the greater picture is. And being a procedural game, I could work on it and then still be surprised by it. Before Minecraft was ever popular, I remember firing up the alpha and saying, "whoa, I wish I was making this, I would do x/y/z." I'm sure a lot of devs felt the same. I also would have wanted to expand it to connect players' worlds via portals (craft a portal, drop it, see where it takes you), to create in interconnected web of universes you could travel through, because wandering through someone else's world adds another entire dimension of wonder.

On a similar note, I would have actually enjoyed working on No Man's Sky (I know Reddit hates it). Again, for similar reasons. Another aspect of games I love is just wandering around taking screenshots of nice landscapes and sights, which NMS really does for me. That's what I spent a lot of WoW doing -- just solo adventuring and setting up nice screenshots, feeling like I'm on my own personal quest to document the beauties of the game.

[u/[deleted]] [8 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
When did you realize that it was time to leave Maxis to pursue your own dreams and goals? Was there a specific event or did this change of mind happen over a long time?

[u/MergeDragons] [15 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
It was a hard decision because I loved working at Maxis, and I loved The Sims. It wasn't like I suddenly hated my job or anything -- I consider myself very lucky to have had a job that made me happy on a regular basis, from working with great people and also making games that bring happiness to such a huge, awesome audience.

One of my struggles on The Sims 4 was using the limited time we had to try and top what we'd done with The Sims 3, and I wasn't sure we could do that out of the gate. Especially because the Sims 3 had amassed so many expansions, and that sum of content is what a lot of players compare the next in the series to (same thing happened for Sims 2). The Sims 4 is a great game, and I like what we did with it, but at the same time I held myself to incredibly high standards and I was somewhat disappointed in myself for not being able to hit my own lofty goals for it.

And that led me to thinking about working independently. Mobile games seemed like a great opportunity to try something fresh where I could have complete control over the content and schedule. The realization slowly dawned on me over the course of a year, mostly in the form of a question -- *What if? What if I tried?*

Another factor was that I had been working on The Sims for 10 years, and I was worried that I might not ever get to experience something different, especially now that I'd had a kid (just 1 year old when I left). I had enough money saved up to support us for a while (and my wife works, too). So I eventually decided to take the plunge. My parting was friendly with Maxis, and I left after we'd locked down the designs for The Sims 4.

At the time, I still wasn't sure it was the right decision, but now I look back and am so happy with my time and experience (and result) of making *Merge Dragons*, that I'm glad I made this decision. I still miss Maxis though!

[u/GrijzePilion] [9 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Hey, I've read all your blog posts about the design on TS3. What was, in your opinion, the best or most interesting thing that *didn't* make it into the end product?

[u/MergeDragons] [19 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
It depends on whether you want to know about something that was in the game and removed, or something that we wanted to put in but didn't have time.

There was one point when we had snow in the base game, and it looked really good! But it had issues like snowing through roofs, and we didn't have time to make all the associated gameplay, so we held that off for Seasons. I so wanted weather in base game though.

Some things we considered but didn't do were: (1) continuous aging rather than discrete age groups, (2) being able to see inside all buildings/shops/work and having the simulations be real in there, and (3) injuries, wheel chairs, casts, etc.

All of those were way too much work to put in, but would have been fantastic.

[u/GrijzePilion] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Yeah, that sounds pretty neat. Clothes shopping (like in TS2) was another cut feature, wasn't it?

By the end of it's life, or at least it's official life (because a Sims game never dies), there was a hell of a lot of packs and content out. Do you think TS3 ended up going in the direction that you guys originally had in mind for it?

[u/MergeDragons] [8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Clothes Shopping -- yes, that was on the list at some point early on. Most TS2 base game features were.

The game certainly went in the direction we'd hoped in the general sense and spirit. We held true to our core beliefs and never changed direction in any major way. I'm very happy with where it ended up.

[u/holy_cockroach] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
What was the initial inspiration for a game like the Sims?

[u/enderandrew42] [11 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I believe Will Wright has repeatedly said the inspiration came when he had a fire and lost all his belongings. He had to buy all new possessions for a house, decorate it, etc. He wanted to gamify an experience he was having in real life. It was developed purely as a dollhouse type simulator and publishers all hated the concept thinking no one would have interest.

It was later in development that testers took a strong interest in the people/sims in the dollhouse and there was development focus on simulating their lives beyond just building a house for them.

And as much as everyone said the idea was stupid, it ended up becoming the single best selling PC game of all time.

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Yes, this is true! EA bought Maxis mainly for SimCity, and The Sims was barely given the time of day.

[u/MergeDragons] [40 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
It’s funny, The Sims was kind of an accident...

The Sims was originally intended to be more of a feng shui simulator. You’d build a home and decorate it, and then the Sims were only added as a way to score you and let you know how you did by walking around and reacting to the home. But then they ended up being everyone’s favorite part, so the dev team leaned into that aspect. *The Sims* was born!

[u/[deleted]] [4 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
How was it like working at EA? I’ve heard stuff about...well, pretty bad working conditions and I’d like some insider perspective - was it really that bad as people (not only) here think?

[u/MergeDragons] [18 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
The short answer is that it really depends on the management of the particular team you are on, and the culture they create. There has been the entire spectrum at EA -- some teams great to work on, others not so much, but EA has been making strides.

When I first joined, I worked on The Sims 2 team in 2003. The team was crunching hard for a long time, and that included one day a weekend for many months. However, I was fresh out of school and just psyched to be in the games industry, and happy to be there even with long hours. Plus, I wanted to learn as much as I could to make sure I was doing as awesome a job as possible. I remember thinking, "holy crap, I’m scripting things that millions of people are going to play... I better not mess up." So I worked long and hard.

Then there was the EA Spouse post, and that opened some eyes. Things were smoother on The Sims 3 even though there was crunching, and even better after. It was also interesting that many of my coworkers in Maxis got married around the same time and had kids around the same time, and were being promoted into positions of more influence, and were realizing their own need for more controlled schedules (to take care of kids at home and be with family), and that has helped.

Even more recently, EA has been sharing their best practices between studios, and learning from each other. There’s one approach that basically forbids any overtime, and is all about making sure that everyone works an awesome, *fully-focused* 8 hours each day during *crunch*, and then the team goes home -- and this has shown to be very productive, rather than having a team "kinda" work for 14 hours a day in a half-dead state.

Overall EA has been great in my experience, especially in how it has evolved and is willing to learn. (Plus, other working conditions are good -- campus gym, on-site daycare, good food, etc.)

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I have mixed feelings.

I don't like that F2P forces a different approach to designing your game (if you want to make any income). There's always that "have to think about how to make money with this and design it in" aspect. It can cloud or entirely prevent good design. And it can completely ruin some otherwise great games if the F2P aspects are too prevalent.

I *do* like that it gives developers a much larger potential audience than for a paid game. But I don't like that I effectively felt forced to go down the F2P path -- it's just much less risky. Games make a lot more money as F2P on average, so it's what I had to do for the best chance of being able to gain an audience and make back money I spent developing *Merge Dragons*.

Given the chance to change history to remove the notion of F2P games, I might very well do that. I also have a problem with paid game prices being so low on phones. There are some excellent games that took a ton of work to make that devs feel pressured to sell for $0.99 or $1.99 when they'd sell for 10x as much on Steam.

Really, this all stems from how accessible game development is nowadays and the economics of getting noticed. It's a blessing for many devs who wouldn't otherwise be able to make games in an older market with closed platforms and not-very-good tools. But it's just really hard to make a living this way and have players find your games. Devs have to be okay with just making something they're proud of even if it doesn't make much money.

Back to F2P -- most F2P games are terrible. Pay to win, high and frequent pay walls, endless streams of popups and deals, glaring copies of other games. I can't stand it. The thing that's hard for me to accept here is that a lot of those games that I think are terrible are in fact making boatloads of money. That means they have millions or tens of millions of players who love them. It saddens me that a lot of those gamers are *growing up* with these and know nothing else, it's just what gaming is to them. And if that's the case, there's nothing that will resolve it -- those games will always have an audience to serve.

I think the best we can do is to keep making games that *we* think are great (F2P or not, and if they're F2P then to be careful about it), and that players will want to play -- and not be able to stop talking about -- due purely to the gameplay and design. I have hope that the best of these games can take over and leave the worst offenders of F2P in the background.

Thanks for such a great question. It's a really interesting topic.

[u/p0537] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Do you know about the dozens of ways there are to kill your "creations" (Sims)?

[u/MergeDragons] [28 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I can't keep track of them all -- burning, starvation, drowning, scared to death, devoured

by flies, old age, electrocution, eaten by a cow plant (yup), various emotions... and there's also becoming the undead (mummy, vampire, werewolf, etc).

I like that the way you die affects the color of your ghost in some of the Sims games.

There's a story about Will Wright, the creator of The Sims, wanting to add a giant pair of scissors to the game (like the size of a person) just so that it could have a *Run With Scissors* interaction on it that would kill you.

[u/[deleted]] [15 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
The Run With Scissors Playset remains my favourite Sims item to this day. The look of pure *joy* on their faces as they run around like loons, right up until the point of death... gets me every time.

Though I remember a *lot* of players at the time didn't get the joke and would complain that their Sims died "for no reason". Their loss. I thought it was great.

[u/MergeDragons] [21 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Haha, yes!

Reminds me of how our most frequent support call was, "My Sims are speaking French, I can't understand them," and they thought they'd gotten the game in the wrong language. In fact, it was just Simlish.

BTW -- Art Vandelay! I loved your book on Venetian Blinds.

[u/[deleted]] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I saw a tweet to the Sims team just today that had something similar. Cracks me up.

Also I don't know what it is, but Maxis devs seem to be the only people on Reddit who actually *get* my username. I'm picturing Seinfeld-watching marathons used as team-building exercises, or maybe the interview room for new employees is designed to resemble the Merv Griffin Show set, or maybe an EA executive who rambles on and on like Mr. Steinbrenner.

[u/GrijzePilion] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Well they do watch a lot of sitcoms, it seems. TS3's full of references and everything.

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
We did use Seinfeld as one of many great references for character traits in TS3.

[u/peasant007] [1 pts] [Jan 6, 2017]
(Late to the party, sorry)

>"My Sims are speaking French, I can't understand them,"

I never called support about it, but when I first installed TS1 back in THE day, when my Sim jumped into the pool, she shouted something that sounded a lot like, "ARRRIBA!" and I thought, "Oh no! I installed it in Spanish!" I uninstalled, reinstalled and MADE SURE that

it was in English. When I had a Sim jump in the pool again (and they made the same sound) THAT'S when I realized that they were, in fact, speaking (what I later found out was called) Simlish.

Good times :)

[u/p0537] [6 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
>There's a story about Will Wright, the creator of The Sims, wanting to add a giant pair of scissors to the game (like the size of a person) just so that it could have a *Run With Scissors* interaction on it that would kill you.

Jesus christ. Is he *really that* sadistic?

[u/MergeDragons] [7 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Or that genius? :)
Yes, that is a true story.

[u/Fissionmission] [3 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Devoured by flies? Lol didn't know that existed. Also the cow plant

[u/MergeDragons] [15 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Those were from The Sims 2. We had a few days where we just brainstormed strange ways to die.

For flies, you had to leave a dirty plate on the ground until it got infested with flies, then if you stepped over the dish, the flies would annihilate you.

The cow plant was funny -- it would try to lure your Sim to it by sticking out its tongue, which had a slice of cake on the end of it.

[u/Fissionmission] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
This is why I love maxis. Hope your departure was well received.

[u/[deleted]] [7 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
If you're still around, I've got a question about your role on The Sims 4, if you don't mind. :)

According to your site, you were responsible for the "game vision" of The Sims 4. I'm really curious about what that game vision actually consisted of, compared to previous Sims titles. Was there a mission statement that Maxis used? And if so, what was it?

[u/MergeDragons] [10 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
There were really two types of visions. There's a super high-level vision that is more about the wow-factor for the game, the differentiator and selling points. That was focused on making the Sims more emotional and more life-like, making the creation tools more

powerful, and building a platform to let players easily share and find content. I didn't make this vision as I came onto the project after it had been going for a few years, and I mainly had to uphold it.

Then there's the detailed vision, which was more personal to me, and was basically a list of features that I thought needed to be in the game for it to top previous Sims games and make players psyched about it. I can't share the details of that though, that would still be confidential.

[u/kaysea112] [6 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Your game looks very nice, polished.

What other games would you compare your game to?

Why should I get excited about playing this game?

[u/MergeDragons] [8 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Thank you kaysea.

Comparisons:

* The merging mechanic is similar *Triple Town*, though the similarity ends there.
* The feel of healing the world reminds me of *Okami*.
* They way the dragons run around and harvest things for you reminds me mildly of *The Sims* in that you've got a bunch of these little beings that seem to have their own agendas.
* The satisfaction of interacting with the game and touching the objects has a PopCap-like feel to it, and *Peggle* and *Bejeweled* have inspired me in many ways there.

You should get excited to play *Merge Dragons* because it's so different than anything else out there, yet so simple to pick up, that it will at least be an interesting 5 minutes for you in a way that will be oddly novel and satisfying (though if you get into it, it could be hours, days, etc). Personally, I love that the game is so much about discovery... it creates a lot of questions in your mind that drive you to want to keep going, and it also surprises you around various corners. Plus -- there's a dragon named McLovin'... how could you not want to try that :) ?

However, if you're only into tactics games, or shooters, etc, and haven't ever really like any casual games, then maybe you won't enjoy this.

Edit: formatting

[u/[deleted]] [8 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
10/10 for creating your own game
but why did you make some weird candy crush+evolution swipe game, instead of something else?

also where did your inspiration come from?

[u/MergeDragons] [13 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Right? One of my personal insecurities about even doing an AMA about it is that a "candy crush+evolution swipe game" is not something that appeals to the typical reddit crowd. I certainly couldn't have done a kickstarter campaign. But I do think *Merge Dragons* is quite different from all that if you play it (though it's no Pillars of Eternity or such).

My reasons are a few:

* Mainly, I wanted to make a game that would appeal to a huge casual audience. Something that my 3 year old could play, something that my mom would enjoy, and something that everyone in between could like. (In fact, I got a tweet the other day from a lady who was playing for hours with her "62 year old daughter". That really made me smile.)
* The main mechanic of merging is perfect for touchscreens (though it does work well with a mouse).
* And, frankly, the gameplay in this game ended up being well suited to casual iOS / Android gamers.

My inspiration
My inspiration came from problems I'd had while developing The Sims Social and Sim City Social (the two facebook games I'd worked on). They were mainly collection games, and players would often fill up their city or house, and then that was it -- that was their end game. They'd stop playing. Nobody wanted to get rid of their stuff to make room for more stuff.

At the time, I'd also been playing a ton of Triple Town and really dug the merging mechanic. At some point a lightbulb went off in my head -- why not use the Triple Town merging mechanic in a decorative collection game? Then players would constantly be making more room for their things while still progressing, and they'd be doing it via a very simple and fun mechanic. After I left Maxis and started development, that idea eventually turned into what *Merge Dragons* is now.

However, I have plenty of desire and ideas for your more typical indie games on PC, or for VR games. For example, I desperately want to make a Zelda-Metroid like game that explores the genre in new ways and would be more appropriate for Steam.

[u/[deleted]] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Id deffinatly play a metroid zelda mix as long as it was pixel graphics.

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I think it would have to be pixel graphics :) Totally agree.

[u/Buffy_B] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I just want to say that The Sims Social was the best app I have ever played. I miss it terribly. I played it with my best friends and my mom. Thanks for bringing us joy!

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Thank you! I'm so glad you enjoyed it!

[u/saltides] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Super late to this AMA but I just downloaded your game AND WAS STUCK ON IT FOR A GOOD HOUR OMG. It’s really fun though, I like the Triple Town situation going on, haha

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Thank you for giving it a try! I really wanted to play up the merging as much as I could and add it to items that you wouldn’t expect, like coins, gems, treasure chests, even the goal stars...

[u/Gaminglion47] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Where did the Idea for the Sims medieval come from? I just ask because my brother and I sent an email when we were younger to Maxis with a similar idea and it would be cool to know if we had any influence on its creation.

[u/MergeDragons] [13 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Thank you for your letter! :)

A lot of the developers are into games with fantasy and medieval settings, and so it was something they’d been thinking about. However, I’m sure your letter was good validation that it was something players wanted :) We liked to hang those letter up around the office.

[u/Pinstar] [8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
What is your favorite Sims "Challenge" (of any of the Sims games)?

[u/MergeDragons] [14 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
If you are referring to the community-made challenges, I liked the Legacy Challenge: http://www.simslegacychallenge.com/legacy-challenge-rules/sims-2-legacy-challenge-rules-core/

[u/Pinstar] [10 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Yay! You like my challenge the most! ^_^

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Oh! I didn’t know that was you, I swear :)
Great job on creating that challenge!

[u/Pinstar] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Thanks! Great job on creating that game! Downloaded Merge Dragons yesterday and I am enjoying it a lot!

[u/Eversnuffley] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Well, I’m impressed!

[u/Jachiros] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]

I know you said you were wrapping up, but just in case you're still answering- do you have any favorite/interesting urban legends you've heard about the Sims games? For example, there were users on the TS3 forums claiming you could marry the Grim Reaper, but I haven't found that to be possible...

[u/MergeDragons] [18 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Haha yes, it's probably back from The Sims 2 when there were so many theories about how to get twins once your Sim was pregnant. Players had all these guaranteed ways they were posting about how to get twins, things that had always worked for them -- eating lobster thermador, jogging religiously, doing yoga after showers, etc. But -- it was just a random number generator. A rare chance. No rhyme or reason.

But the fans had such a field day with it, that we eventually caved and added ways to increase your chances of twins, for real :)

Another thing is worth mentioning because it's worthy of an urban legend, except that it's real, and it's one of my favorite things I've implemented. If in The Sims 2 you get robbed and call the cops, and the cop captures the thief, there is a brief moment after the cop puts the thief in the back of the cop car when you can run over and release him/her. That instantly gives you a great relationship with the thief, and you can then be friends and invite them over.

[u/Jachiros] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Thanks for answering!

[u/stonecloakwand] [6 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
A lot of the time, the game devs for Sims 4 reason that they cannot contribute a certain product or feature for the sims 4 is because of a lack of team members. Examples of items they say they cant produce: spiral stair cases, toddlers, better roofing options.

What can we do, as the fanbase, to get their attention and show the devs these are important aspects of the game. Futhermore, isthis a viable excuse from them not to provide such content or over all is it an excuse to simply not supply the fanbase with what they want?

[u/MergeDragons] [16 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Usually, devs feel the same way as you, and literally cannot do anything about it, because of a schedule or budget they cannot control. Honestly, I think you're already doing a great job at getting their attention through Sims fan sites, twitter, the Sims forums, etc. Trust me, they have a long list of things you care about (especially because a lot of the production and design team are fans themselves and want the same things) and they want to do it all, they just need to find the time/resources.

I do believe their reasoning is viable. There is only so large the team can be before it is no longer profitable to run compared to other games EA makes. What the team really needs for the future is a better set of tools and a better process which allows them to make content quicker, and repurpose content from previous Sims games more easily into new Sims games.

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 15, 2017]
And there you go, now there are toddlers!
https://www.thesims.com/news/sims-4-adds-toddlers

I don't know what the reasoning was for surprising everyone and not saying there were working on it, but they were definitely hearing the feedback and had made this a priority.

[u/[deleted]] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Who at Maxis is responsible for the character canon in The Sims and which characters cross over to new editions of the game?

[u/MergeDragons] [7 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
That has evolved over time, and there have been different people on each title responsible for that, usually on the world building part of the team. There are enough people involved that I can't really give names. It's not just a single genius toiling away. On The Sims 3, it was mostly driven by producers and writers, and a ton of thought goes into where the game fit into the timeline of the universe, and which characters could be part of that continuous universe story thread.

[u/Lus_] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Can someone be a creative director/designer, without got a degree?

[u/MergeDragons] [7 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
It's certainly possible. The most important things are to be able to think critically about games, and if possible prove that you can make/design them (by doing it as a hobby). Not having a degree may stop you from getting to an interview sometimes, but once you get an interview, degree is mostly irrelevant for design, production, and art, and more important for engineering.

You may want to check out a post I wrote about getting into game design:
http://www.raymazza.com/game-design/breaking-into-game-design

[u/Lus_] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
To clarify: do not have an high education at all in that field, or not even a diploma.

My goal is not the videogame field (never say never) but something else. I'll read you link, thanks for the advice.

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I can't really comment on fields outside of game development. But it's even possible to get into game development without a full high school degree. At that point, you just need to prove yourself with your skills and what you've been able to make.

[u/Lus_] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Seems fair.

[u/etray] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Why couldn't Simcity Social last? Why did EA shut it down? And thanks for Sims Medieval quests, great little game!

[u/MergeDragons] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Sims Medieval quests were so much fun! Gotta love that Love Doctor :)

SimCity Social just wasn't making enough money eventually -- same basic reason any online game shuts down : / It did great for a while, then players moved on. The unfortunate thing about working on server-based games is that you know at some point in the future they will just be gone. I love being able to load up Sims 1/2/3 any time I want, knowing I'll always be able to play. The Sims Social and SimCity Social just have to be memories.

[u/MergeDragons] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
That was a long time ago, so I don't remember. I can speculate that those screenshots were likely early in the process, and we had to make a lot of updates to hair along the way, and they probably didn't have time to have the updates made to them. I agree though -- those were great hairstyles. Hair was always the most important aspect of Sim creation because it has such a profound effect on the overall look.

[u/[deleted]] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
What was it like to work at Maxis?

[u/MergeDragons] [7 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
* People are smart, friendly, and funny. Only occasional bad apples.
* The campus was nice (not Google or Facebook nice, but almost as good).
* Relatively high amount of female employees compared to a lot of other game companies.
* It's awesome to work on games with such a devoted and creative fan base, and to be surprised by all the awesome creations your players come up with.
* But overall, what you'd think of it mostly comes down to how much you enjoy the games you're working on. I loved working on The Sims, because in a game about life, almost anything is fair game. The design space is so wide that I never saw myself getting bored of the designs or felt like we had run out of ideas. There was always so much more we wanted to do than we could get done, so that's a bit of a curse and a blessing.

All in all, a great time.

[u/ThomYorkesEvilTwin] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Do you think the whole world is a simulation?

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
This is one of my favorite questions, and one of the ideas my technothriller novels explore.

Check out the "Simulation Hypothesis" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulation_hypothesis

The gist of this mind game goes like this: *Do you believe that in this universe we are capable of making a simulation of a civilization and life as detailed as ours, with

inhabitants that would believe they were real? It doesn't have to be now or even on Earth, but at any point in time will any intelligence in the universe be capable? If you believe this, then you probably believe that we would be capable of making many of those such simulations. But then there's no telling if we are in one of those simulations, in a less advanced state, or the one true world. And if there could potentially be many such simulations, then the vast majority of living beings that exist would exist in one of those simulations. Chance would thus dictate that you and I are with near 100% likelihood a simulation.*

[u/MergeDragons] [8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I can't remember which Beta you're referring to, but it's likely because a lot of a Sims game pulls together at the last minute as everything starts working in harmony since there are so many interconnected pieces.

There were no devastating office fires in my time there, though a toaster caught on fire once :)

[u/SpliTTMark] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Why wasn't the Sims mod friendly ?

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Not sure which Sims you're referring to. We've had plenty of mods, but to your point, we could have done more to make modding easier. On TS3, we actually wanted to, but just didn't have the time. We did hand out our world building tools, but we had also wanted to support scripting in a better way. Hopefully someday we can, because a more moddable Sims game would give rise to so many great creations!

[u/[deleted]] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Did you work on Spore, and if you did, were you in the "Making Of Spore" Video or in the "How to build a better being" video?

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Nope, I did not work on Spore. That mostly took place in our Emeryville studio. I worked in the Redwood Shores studio. Originally Maxis was in Walnut Creek, CA, then shortly after EA bought them the studio split in two, and the Sims portion went to Redwood Shores, and Will Wright went to Emeryville with Spore.

[u/[deleted]] [5 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Oh Cool. I have a question about the .package files of sims 2. Are they the same kind as Spore or do they have different "features"?

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I don't know, but I would guess they have their fundamental differences.

[u/joe1up] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Where you involved in the development of spore at all? If so, what would you have done differently?

[u/MergeDragons] [5 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I wasn't involved in Spore at all, that was at a different studio. I thought the grand idea was fantastic, but the game tried to do too much -- I might have removed certain stages from the middle of the game to focus more on the beginning and end stages.

[u/Noxid_fps] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I'm also a game dev, though nowhere close to your experience level. Just wondering, you've worked on a AAA title with a studio that has one of the longest track records in the industry, that basically means you don't really need to worry too much about getting fans and purchases. But switching to being an indie mobile game, how are you planning to reach out to the players and get downloads?

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Hi, that's a good question. Getting exposure is the hardest part because you have the least control over it. I think it's particularly difficult for me with a causal game because the audience I'm going for isn't one that reads gaming blogs or signs up for newsletters or follows the development of a game closely. And I certainly couldn't kickstart this type of game. Those are all things that would be possible if I was something more like a game you'd find on Steam.

So here's what I've done thus far:

* First, I started emailing gaming sites. I found a few compiled lists of sites, their influence level, and their addresses, and just started emailing away. I got a few responses and articles, like this one: http://appolicious.com/a-conversation-with-ray-mazza-the-mastermind-behind-merge-dragons/. However, overall this wasn't worthwhile. I'd have to hit the jackpot with an article on Kotaku or Penny Arcade or such for it to really be worth it.
* I also started doing the same for YouTube game reviewers. But again, I think you have to hit the jackpot with the top influencers for this to make a worthwhile impact.
* I threw a ship party and invited friends and co-workers, which got some people in my network talking about the game.
* I emailed Apple's 2 addresses for promotion twice. I heard back the second time, provided them with more info, then didn't get another response. My hope there was to get featured, as all mobile devs hope.
* I posted to Facebook, and I have a fairly large network I've built up, and that helped spread the word pretty well because most of my connections are game devs, and their connections are game devs, etc. This was great because a bunch of groups at various game companies started playing and evangelizing to their friends. I didn't expect Facebook to work so well. That got me a good audience out of the gate, but it wasn't life-changing.
* I created a facebook page and try to post things occasionally: https://www.facebook.com/mergedragons/
* I tried paying for marketing via facebook, but that was way too expensive.
* I posted once to Linked In (publicly), and specifically asked if anyone in my network knew any influencers or had any connections to app store editors. That didn't turn up any influencers or editors, but it helped me make strong connections to game companies that liked Merge Dragons.

* I ran a contest on Twitter to give away a copy of The Sims 2 signed by the dev team (I had an extra), and asked players to post screenshots of their Merge Dragons games with #mergedragons. See: https://twitter.com/hashtag/mergedragons. That did quite well for me as it created a lot of talk about the game and built a nice community on Twitter. Again, it was nothing life-altering, but a decent bump in audience. The best part about it was having good conversation with interested players.
* This AMA, though again, it's not going to do much for me unless it hits the front page.
* Lastly, I'm using Chartboost for marketing. It's one of the more recent things I've tried. I've experimented with targeting a 30s video clip of the game to different types of gamers in the US, and I think I've found a segment of players to market to where the cost to get an install is less than the return I see from the install. In jargon, eCPI < LTV. But I don't know how well it scales yet. Over half of my installs are from ads.

All in all, it's a lot of chipping away. I still need to work my connections a bit more. Honestly, for me, there are really only a few viable paths to a huge audience:
1. Get featured by app stores.
2. A major influencer plays and loves *Merge Dragons*, then tweets it / posts a video about it / etc.
3. A 3rd party company decides they want part of the action.
4. Advertising return on investment ends up scaling well.

All this takes a lot of time. So much comes down to luck. The right person or connection deciding to take interest could instantly change the future of the game. But it's not something you can depend on.

Thanks for the great question, and I wish you the best of luck with your projects!

[u/Noxid_fps] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I really feel your pain, as I am also doing the less hardcore game genres. (Puzzle, Causal, Arcade, Action) I've tried much of the same in Asia, though the geological location is different, we're seeing some very similar situations. Sharing some of the things I did over the past few years.

* Game reviews. Definitely like you said, the chance of getting it picked up by a magazine is very slim. And even after finally landing on some coverage with magazines in Taiwan and Hong Kong, we found that we're looking at a second problem. game review readers are often less inclined to play a casual / puzzle game after reading the articles. Less your game stands out among some of the AAA titles, or is becoming a trend that they have to be in for the moment, most players are not really going to bother downloading and trying it out a casual game at all.

* Apple and Google. We got lucky and was featured on Google Play twice, and the got invited to Google HQ after they site visited our office (I was really surprised when they said they want to come for a visit). On the other hand, we never heard a word from Apple. Yes, I mean ever since we made our first game back in 2013, never a single word from Apple over the 4-5 games we made. Only thing we ever get from Apple is, your app has been rejected. :P

* Facebook is indeed super expensive these days. Most of the mature markets cost you over

two dollar USD to get a single download these days. (Too many people out there bidding for download, jacking the price to record breaking high everyday) Like you said, the eCPI simply can't justify the amount you get from rewarded ads or video ads. I find that this formula seems to work well with high LTV games with heavily reliance on IAP. For casual game developers, you'll get burn very easily.

* YouTube videos again is very similar game reviews. Chance of getting a big influencer to review your game is very slim at best. It is however, possible to make friends with some of lesser known YouTubers via other social media channels. At least they will have a little more time on hand, and perhaps willing to hear you out.

* Trying out Reddit now. I wonder how effective this may be. :D

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Thank you for sharing your own experiences. It's really helpful to hear about this. Was your Google featuring just luck, or did you contact them somehow in a way that led to the feature?

[u/Noxid_fps] [2 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
It was a bit of both actually. Google featured our games a few times but we never heard a word from them. We just found out one morning "Hey! We're on the front page!?" :D

Later on, when I attended to game shows, I came across some of the Google staff. I gave them my card, and they were like, "Oh! You're that indie game we featured not too long ago!" We had some chats, exchanged emails, but they are very honest with me. The team choosing what to put on the feature section do not go around to do greet and meet. Even if you manage to talk to some of the staff, they probably can't affect that particular team's decisions on what to put on the feature section. (Though I did hear from somewhere that you can actually pay to do a paid promotion these days, and they will feature you on the front page)

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Ah, cool, thanks for sharing. Must be exciting to just stumble across your game being featured!

[u/Noxid_fps] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Treat the following as just rumors. I heard that Google is now judging whether they will feature your game or not based on:

* Daily revenue (need to be at least like 2K USD daily revenue)
* Do you have promotion or branding that Google can ride on or collaborate with

So unless you are able to get on the red carpet, chances are, your game title will be given to a small team of Google staff who is buried under all the game titles in the region that they're responsible for.

[u/jitterydecaf] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Hi, longtime Sims fan here (been playing since 2001).

I've always loved each iteration of the Sims, but the Sims 4 confused me with its marketing and release (twitter post after post on missing features, saying there would be all life states and then taking that back, many missing 'basic' features such as CAST, toddlers, open world, editable lots, etc). Some of it has been replaced and added into the game, but some hasn't.

However, we still haven't heard about the toddler life stage. My first question is, why has EA/Maxis been so quiet about this, and have not answered any queries onto whether or not toddlers will be returning? Why have they been so secretive on upcoming content until just a few weeks before it launches, whereas in other Sims titles we got lengthy previews months before? (think the leaflets in the Sims 2 CD boxes).

My final question is, the Sims 4 seems to be aimed at the younger crowd, with a big focus on the Young Adult life stage/partying. Why the change from family play/CAST/ oriented gameplay?

This is not to say I don't enjoy the Sims 4, I think many aspects of it are great, but those are some of my questions pertaining to what's missing/different.

Thanks in advance!

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I don't have answers about the specific features you mentioned because I am not there, but I can try to answer in general terms.

Sometimes the dev team is quiet because they don't know the answer. The could be working on a feature without knowing when it will be completed, or they could be planning on developing something but without knowing when, and so they choose not to talk about it and make promises they can't keep.

Personally, I'd be open about things like that, but their marketing department likes to make sure they know exactly when a thing will be done so they can make a plan to get everyone excited about it.

As for your question about the younger crowd, I don't know. When I was there, there was no specific initiative to put more focus on those things. Maybe that has developed in the content since then? Or was that something you felt even in the base game?

[u/[deleted]] [7 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I can't speak for jitterydecaf, but I did notice a shift towards a younger demographic as far back as TS2. Things like tween pop stars like Hilary Duff doing promos for TS2 Pets, or the many Twilight and Vampire Diaries references in TS3 Supernatural that seemed tailored towards teen girls. Then there were the fairies, unicorns and mermaids.

TS4 also seems "happier" than previous games, and less punishing, which makes it seem like it's directed more towards casual players rather than longtime fans. It's very difficult to get things to go wrong (eg. house fires), and when they do, your Sim will be fine more

often than not. A good example is how you need to get electrocuted *twice* before dying of electrocution in TS4.

Compare that to TS1 or TS2, where anything that could go wrong very well might, for no reason whatsoever. In the elevator? It could crash. Cloudgazing? Meteorite. Making breakfast? House burns down and your 10th generation legacy Sim dies before the fire department gets there. Not to mention the lack of burglars in TS4.

That's not to say I dislike TS4 (in fact I like it far more than TS3), but it does seem to be overall less prone to throwing a spanner in the works.

[u/jitterydecaf] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
This is pretty spot on, and also addresses the missing humor/danger element to TS4.

[u/jitterydecaf] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Thanks for your reply. I guess the focus seems more on YA because of more clubs, group interactions, no toddlers/family trees (before they were added in), no different heights for teens/YA, etc.

[u/Maikumizu] [2 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Any plans to make a new variant of sim tower in your spare time?

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Nope, but I know that Maxis still has its share of Sim Tower enthusiasts :) Maybe one day they'll make another!

[u/Maikumizu] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Any plans to change your plans?

[u/Casey1116] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Maikumizu, I really liked that game too. There is something new out called Project Highrise that looks similar. Unfortunately, my computer is dated and doesn't meet the minimum requirements to run it :-(

[u/MergeDragons] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
A plan is just a list of things that don't happen...

[u/Maikumizu] [3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Thanks for your replies. I hope your new venture yields unimaginable happiness.

[u/cyph3rdastier] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Hi there!
The game looks promising and i wanted to test it but the Play Store says it is not available in my country. (Germany)

So when will the game be released in other countries?
I would love to play it and there should be an option to install it in english even for germans :(

Well i guess i have to use VPN to download it now :/

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
It's in most countries, but there are a few I held back, like Germany, France, Russia, etc, which are big for gaming and worth doing translations for. Once I have translations, I will release in those other countries, including yours. The reason I don't release early in English and then do an update is because app stores are much more likely to feature a game that is launching fresh.

German is the first language I have underway though! (Thanks to a dedicated Sims fan who is helping out.)

[u/[deleted]] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Wanted to download merge dragons but it's not available in the french app store, is this not a worldwide release? If it's because it's only in english i'd suggest releasing it in all stores now and translating later, no one likes to be late on progression because the game didn't release at the same time

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
It's worldwide except for a few larger countries that I'm waiting on translations for, including France. I would totally have already released it there, but to have a better chance at getting featured by the app stores, it has to be a new release and be in the native language, which is why I'm holding it back. I'm sorry it's not available for you, and I see your point.

[u/cyph3rdastier] [2 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Well that answered my question below, thank you, patience is difficult sometimes :D

[u/[deleted]] [0 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Do you think we'll ever get another similar simulation series such as The Sims in the future?

I remember pouring countless hours into that game but haven't really played it since The Sims 3 originally released. The Sims is a dying franchise but I hope the genre doesn't die with it.

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Germany still has a lot of really hardcore simulation games, but it's rare to have a great simulation that has a lot of character and creative aspects like in The Sims.

I think there will definitely be more simulation games that will blow us and our free time away in the future. They may be in VR though. Either way, I do think we'll see more eventually.

EDIT: What really excites me is the state of machine learning and deep learning algorithms. In the not-too-distant future, they will run quickly enough to embed in the AI of characters, animals, and simulation networks. Then simulation games will be crazy awesome.

I mean, just imagine the smaller aspects, like if your game character sat down to paint a painting, and actually created an interesting, original piece of work? Check out this site for AI generated art based on a set of inputs, it blows me away: http://ostagram.ru/static_pages/lenta?last_days=30&locale=en

[u/Mavrick593] [2 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Any plans to port Merge Dragons to Amazon Fire devices?

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I'd like to. I first need to have a solid grasp on iOS and Android in terms of making sure I've ironed out any last bugs, and I also am working on translation into some of the major languages. Once I get through that, I will try looking into Amazon Fire devices. Thanks for your question, Mavrick!

[u/pastorignis] [-6 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
how thinly veiled of a marketing attempt is this AMA?

[u/MergeDragons] [13 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I enjoy sharing my experiences and thoughts, as you could see from my many blog and game design articles, but of course I also want to raise awareness for my game. But all AMAs are marketing -- it's just a question of whether someone is marketing a thing, an idea, or themselves.

[u/pastorignis] [-8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
no need to be cynical, a simple answer of 'not veiled at all' would have sufficed. that was an excellent rebuttal though, you know your stuff.

[u/mizary1] [9 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
"cynical" I don't think you know what that word means. Your simple response of "not veiled at all" would have been far more cynical sounding than his excellent explanation.

[u/pastorignis] [-6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
its cynical in its assumption of the intent of an AMA. not everyone is a self promoting product. maybe you'll get a free game for white knighting though! that bit at the end should really do the trick.

[u/mizary1] [8 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Like he said anyone doing an AMA is promoting a product, idea or themselves. Show me an example of an AMA where that isn't the case. Even if it's some poor kid with cancer doing an AMA to help boost awareness they are still promoting an idea.

I just thought it was a good insight.

[u/pastorignis] [-3 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
AMA weren't always about advertising yourself. there was a time when it was just people answering questions about something they where or experienced. not everyone wanted to make a buck off of it. i did an AMA on the time i spent working as a video game tester, because

it was something i wanted to do, not because i wanted money from strangers.

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Right on. In that case, it’s not veiled. I didn’t know you were actually curious, the question came off more like a statement :)

[u/TheFlatypus] [2 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Is it science based?

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Is what science based? I as a person am based in science.

[u/TheFlatypus] [1 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
There was another game with dragons in it from a few years ago www.reddit.com/r/gaming/comments/p1ssv/dear_internet_im_a_26_year_old_lady_whos_been

Your game looks much better :p The Sims has taken days out of my life and I’m sure your new game will too

[u/MergeDragons] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
OMG, that cracks me up, thank you for sharing! My game is not science-based. It’s historical.

[u/GrijzePilion] [6 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
> The Sims has taken *days* out of my life

Pff, noob.

[u/snorlz] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
do you regret leaving?

im still having trouble understanding the choice to leave a AAA dev and a wildly successful, household name franchise to go make mobile games. you know full well that gamers look down on mobile games

[u/MergeDragons] [4 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
There are times when I’ve regretted leaving. Not 100%, but about 60%. Right now, with a launched game that is out there making a lot of players happy, I don’t regret it at all. But the in-betweens were more gray area.

My friends are almost all Maxis devs, and I get to see them often. So although I miss working with them, I’m not so distanced that any of my regret is around separation from them.

As for the work, I don’t really have regret around giving up that work because I have spent 10 years on Sims games, and it’s great to get different experiences. The Sims will always have a fond place in my heart, and I would certainly consider going back to work there again. I also haven’t been full time indie for the full three years. I started needing a

paycheck again a while back, and now I am Lead System Designer on Vainglory with Super Evil Megacorp, which is another great experience to have and diversifies my skillset and network. I have to cram work on *Merge Dragons* into my nights and weekends.

The only real source of regret I had was financial, to be honest. As I was burning through cash to fuel my passion, EA stock was climbing back up to highs that it hadn't seen since I first joined. I happened to have relatively poor luck in that when I joined, the stock went up for a bit, then mostly went low and stayed low for my tenure there. Then I leave, and it skyrockets, and I imagine how nice it would be to have that extra cash around.

> you know full well that gamers look down on mobile games

Yup, I know that. I definitely couldn't kickstart this game. But "gamers" (core gamers in the sense that you're using it) weren't my target audience for *Merge Dragons*. I was intentionally making this game for a casual audience. I wanted my 4 year old to be able to have fun with it, and 80 year olds, and everyone in between who was looking for a light, fun, novel experience. And I'm happy with that. I get my fix of working on core games from developing Vainglory.

That said, the next independent game I make is likely to be a gamer's game.

[u/Dystirium] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
I know you are done with this but if you possible do come back, were there any plans to implement any type of severe weather in The Sims?

[u/MergeDragons] [2 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
We definitely talked about severe whether from time to time. I can't speak to any plans for it, but I know a lot of us thought it would be fun.

[u/ImaginationDoctor] [6 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
/u/MergeDragons I'm bummed I missed this.

I skimmed over this and I just had to tell you--- bravo on allowing us to interact with NPCs aside from just the "dismiss" and "fire." That was one of the changes from Sims 1 to 2 that I thought was monumental.

Are you aware that Sims 2 has seemed to find a new life? Many have sort of gone back to it. I can't speak for everyone, but I think Sims 2 really improved on "The Sims" concept and made it even better.

I know some have said they wish The Sims 2 was "restored" with the graphics from Sims 4.

[u/Unbathed] [1 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Do you remember the programmer / game developer Bill Williams?

After playing MergeDragons for a few levels, I am reminded of the mood of creating and healing instead of fighting that Bill Williams' games often invoked.

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
I haven't played any of his pre-NES games, which seems like where his best stuff is, but I'm looking through them now. Do you have a recommendation for a specific game I should check out? A few look interesting, like Mind Walker, Knights of the Crystallion, Sinbad, Salmon Run...

[u/PM_ME_FRENCH_INHALE] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
How about a PC release?

I don't have Android or iOS (I have WP, but that's dead and not worth the trouble).

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Heh, sorry to hear about the WP.

Merge Dragons actually works quite well with a mouse, and I've watched plenty of people play it that way. So it's quite possible, and on my list of things I would eventually like to do once I have mobile nailed down. That would be many months out though.

[u/PM_ME_FRENCH_INHALE] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
I have a backlog on Steam, so no worries there ;)

RemindMe! 1 year "Merge Dragons PC"

[u/Bbilbo1] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
Will we ever see an official or unofficial sequel to SimCopter? It was WAY ahead of it time, in that it basicaly wascompatible with save files from a completely different game (simcity2000).

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
SimCopter lived in a different universe of Maxis than me, so I don't know anything about it. I'm glad to hear it still has fans though!

[u/GrijzePilion] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
If it's made by Maxis, it still has fans. It's almost like a religion to some. But a peaceful one, don't worry!

[u/stratospaly] [1 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Who is John Galt?

[u/MergeDragons] [1 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
One of my favorite novels is The Fountainhead. For some reason, I couldn't get into Atlas Shrugged, but it may be time to try again?

[u/[deleted]] [3 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]

Really random questions I have always wondered:

1. Are there people specifically responsible for building the pre-stocked houses/buildings/sims/etc.? Did you make any of them personally?

2. Were there any expansion pack ideas that were going to be made/discussed that didn't make the final cut?

3. What was the most (from a technical standpoint) difficult thing to implement into The Sims gameplay?

[u/__friendly_friend] [2 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
I am just dying to know if there was any further backstory of the stuff with the Caliente sisters? and the Goth family/Bella Goth being abducted from Sims 2? Or really anything behind the backstory of some one the families In Sims 2. I thought it was an interesting aspect of the game. Also what influenced bringing the younger versions/different versions of characters in the Sims 2 to the Sims 3?

[u/DBX12] [2 pts] [Jan 6, 2017]
Why did nobody fix that bug, that you can not cancel the "make bed" action in Sims 2? They start walking to the bed, I'm like "no, better feed your child first it'll cry soon" but he keeps walking to the bed just to turn around and go feed the kid.

But I really like the 1+2 game, haven't played the other yet.

[u/_aboe01] [1 pts] [Jan 4, 2017]
What was the biggest reason there wasn't open world in Sims 4 like it was in Sims 3? (traveling everywhere, no loading zones)?
Also, what software did you use for the models in Sims 3 and 4?

[u/_aboe01] [1 pts] [Jan 5, 2017]
Thanks.

[u/AutoModerator] [0 pts] [Jan 3, 2017]
Users, please be wary of proof. You are welcome to ask for more proof if you find it insufficient.

OP, if you need any help, please message the mods [here](http://www.reddit.com/message/compose?to=%2Fr%2Fiama&subject=&message=).

Thank you!

I am a bot, and this action was performed automatically. Please [contact the moderators of this subreddit](/message/compose/?to=/r/IAmA) if you have any questions or concerns.